RESULTS of the
RANGELAND DECISION-MAKING SURVEY

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Wyoming rangelands encompass diverse lands across the state, from prairie to sagebrush to mountain forests. These lands are managed for livestock production as well as a variety of other goals such as wildlife, energy, water, and open space. How management decisions are made on these diverse lands was the central question for the Rangeland Decision-Making Survey, a collaborative effort among the Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA), the USDA-Agricultural Research Service, the University of Wyoming and the University of California-Davis. The survey asked WSGA producer members about their goals, ranch characteristics, and management practices. A total of 307 ranchers (50%) responded. Survey results were published in March 2013 and are available online: http://www.scirp.org/journal/nr/

KEY FINDINGS

Wyoming ranching operations are diverse.

- Ranches grazed from 75 to nearly 460,000 acres total, with a median size of 10,440 acres.
- Most ranches included privately owned land (90%). Over half of ranches (71%) also included public land (federal or state). Private leased land was also common (60%).
- Most ranches grazed cow/calf pairs (91%), with a median of 260 pairs per ranch. Nearly half ran stockers (44%). About one tenth (12%) ran sheep. Few operations ran only stockers or only sheep.
- Other activities affected land management on almost three quarters of ranches (74%; Figure 1).

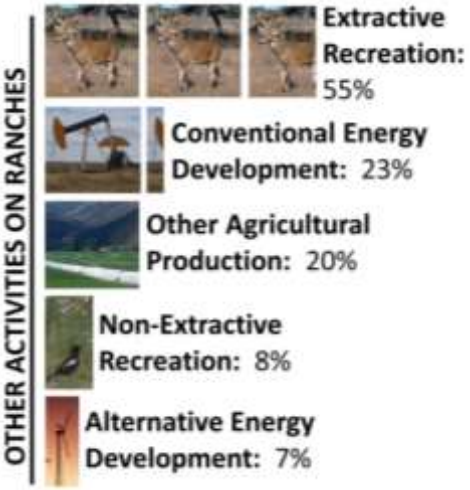

Figure 1. Percentage of ranches that include other activities affecting management.

Primary management goals are livestock production and forage production (Figure 2).

- Secondary goals were water quality, riparian/meadow health, soil health, and invasive weed management.
- Wildlife, recreation, and carbon sequestration trailed behind.

Drought management practices are varied.

- Over 80% of ranches prepared for drought by applying certain management practices, but 100% responded to drought.
- Preparations for drought included stocking conservatively (48%), resting pastures (47%), increasing flexibility by adding stockers (28%), grass banking/stockpiling forage (22%), and using 1-3 month weather predictions to adjust stocking rates (16%).
- Responses to drought were reducing herd size (80%), purchasing feed (63%), weaning early (47%), renting additional pastures (42%), moving livestock to another location (27%), and selling retained yearlings (24%).
- Over a third (40%) of ranchers said that drought will be more influential in their management plans and operations in the next 10 years than it had been in the prior 10 years.

Figure 2. Management goals.

Management practices emphasize livestock production and improvement of natural resources.

- Grazing management generally involved a less than 90-day rotation (87%) of 1-5 herds (84%) through multiple pastures (92%) and incorporated rest (99%; Figure 3).
- The most important facilities management practices were water development (91%) and fencing (81%).
- The most popular herd management practices were planning for herd health and supplemental feed (93%, 90%) and matching calving season and genetics to local conditions (93%, 90%).
- Natural resource management practices, including vegetation management (90%) and landscape enhancements (69%), were also commonly used. The most popular vegetation management practices were grazing livestock and using herbicides to change plant species composition (64%, 68%). The most frequent landscape enhancement was restoring meadows and wetlands (52%).

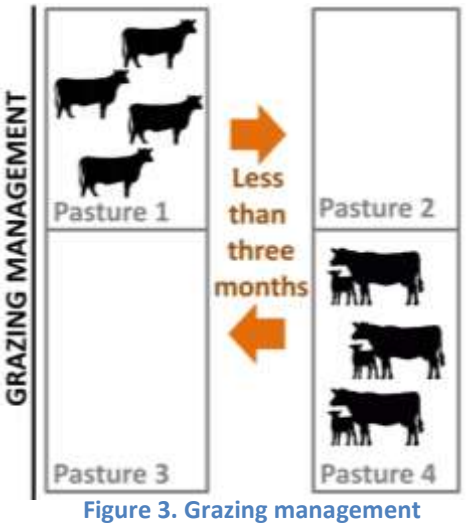

Figure 3. Grazing management practices.

A multi-pronged approach using several different media sources may be most effective for outreach and education about rangeland management.

- Other ranchers were the most often-used (97%) source of information about ranching.
- Over 80% of ranchers had internet access, mostly via high speed connections (75%). Almost half accessed the internet every day (Figure 4).
- A majority preferred to receive information about ranching through print publications (69%), more than the internet (21%) or word of mouth (27%).

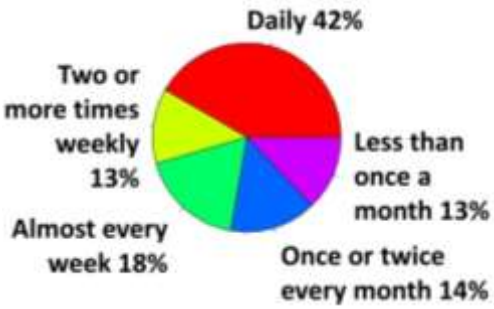

Figure 4. Frequency of internet access, among those who had internet access.

NEXT STEPS

These key findings are being incorporated into a series of scientific and popular press articles that will highlight the importance of on-ranch decision making to producing both ecosystem goods (livestock production) and services (clean water, wildlife habitat) from Wyoming rangelands. The first article, describing Wyoming ranch characteristics and management practices, was published in March 2013 in the online journal Natural Resources and is available at the following Web address: http://www.scirp.org/journal/nr/

Learn more by visiting the new **Wyoming Rangeland Decision-Making Project website**!

http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=23087

For more information or to receive a copy of the new survey results article, contact:
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This project is funded by a grant from the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program.